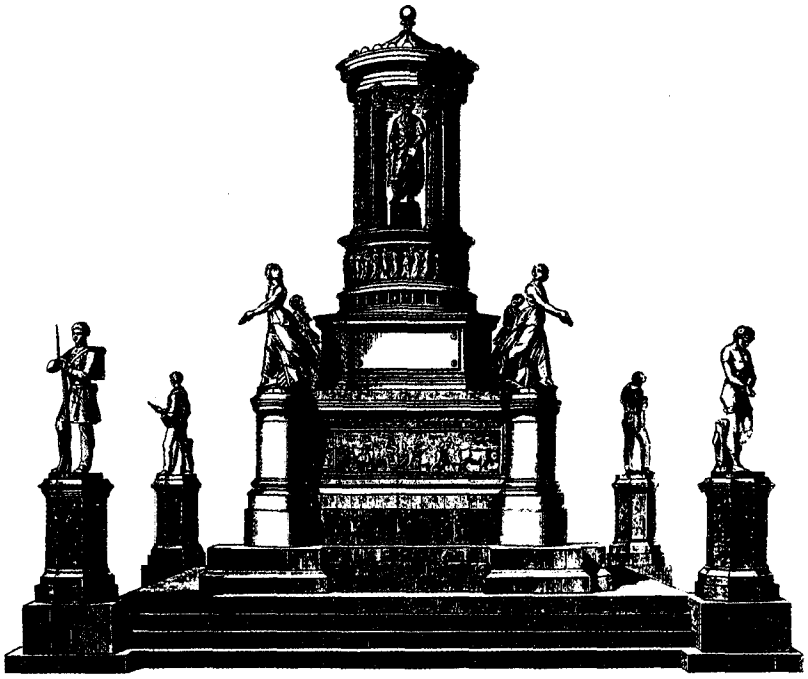

4.3 Harriet Hosmer, design for Freedmen's Memorial to Lincoln, in [London] *Art-Journal* 7 (January 1, 1868): 8.

sculpturally speaking, invisible. Critics who saw the model or photographs of it did not fail to appreciate the significance. Before Hosmer, wrote the *Independent*, "sculpture [of Lincoln] remained silent, or only feebly articulate. It has spoken at last—to a negro woman whom Lincoln emancipated—by Harriet Hosmer, the New England artist." It was of course the "negro" connection that gave her design voice, made it speak for the age. The monument was "Hosmer's masterpiece" and "our greatest work of art." Critics singled out the African American statues as the best part of the design, and *Harper's Monthly* hoped Hosmer would execute them whatever the fate of the monument.[26]

Despite the praise Hosmer tinkered with the placement of the African American cycle, and actually made a second design in which the same cycle occupies the outermost corners while the allegories shift inward and become standing figures passing wreaths of victory down toward the black men (fig. 4.3). In this design, published in the London *Art-Journal*, Lincoln is a standing figure holding a broken chain, and the allegories therefore serve as intermediary figures linking him with the African American; we read down from his emancipatory act through the

allegories to the achievement of black liberation. The whole design returns the center of agency and responsibility to the active figure of Lincoln. Hosmer then rejected this revised design and returned to her original, except that she tried simply reversing the placement of the mourning figures and the black figures. She was trying to solve a formal problem, which was how to lead the eye downward through the composition. The mourning figures, with their diagonal trumpets, created a graceful link between top and bottom, while the emancipation cycle tended to catch the eye and hold it there. "For point of sentiment" she preferred the black figures in the center, but "for the general outline" she preferred the mourning figures there.[27]

By the time Hosmer was considering these changes, the Western Sanitary Commission had come to realize that it could not muster the huge sums needed to carry out Hosmer's project. But her design had acquired a life of its own, and in the commissioners' minds it became more important to erect it than to preserve the original idea of the fund. Hence, in the summer of 1868, they made the extraordinary offer of merging their resources with those of the National Lincoln Monument Association in Springfield. There was just one condition: Hosmer's design had to be chosen. This proposal would have further diminished the importance of the original black donors, as their contributions would simply disappear into the much larger fund already collected for the tomb. Ultimately the move failed, but out of it came one extremely revealing document—a letter written on Hosmer's behalf, with the commission's approval, by the distinguished Henry Bellows, president of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, the major war relief agency for the Union.[28]

Bellows's letter, an elaborate defense of Hosmer's design addressed to the governor of Illinois, is one of the most learned essays on monuments written in the nineteenth century, but quite apart from its general interest it demonstrates how even such a clear program as Hosmer's could be dissociated from the freedmen and reinterpreted to fit the demands of a new monument and a new public. Bellows begins his exposition by arguing that the preservation of the Union was the "object" of the war, while emancipation, however noble a result, was merely the "condition" of the war's success. This distinction then determines how the commemorative attention of the monument should be distributed. It is fit for the freedmen's monument to make emancipation its leading idea, but "in a *National* Monument" the theme of emancipation must remain subsidiary to the dominant theme of Union. Implicit is the idea that emancipation—and the shift from slave to free society it entailed—was less a shared "national" interest than the maintenance of Union. Bellows claims that Hosmer's design lays the stress on Union where it belongs—in the upper part of the structure, the temple. As for the inscription from the Emancipation

Proclamation on the temple, which seems to undercut his argument, he points out that the word slavery does not occur in it. Slavery is represented instead on the lower level, on a platform of its own—"as if detaching Slavery and all its works from a Union, which was foreign in all its purposes and in its very spirit from that historical accident and incubus." While it should be remarked that this interpretation rests on some dubious claims—that slavery was foreign to the national spirit, that Hosmer's design reflects that foreignness—it is especially notable that the argument turns the earlier praise for Hosmer's model on its head. For the *Independent* the "negro" theme is what made the design "articulate" to the public; the critic even suggested that there should be black figures among the allegories in the Union frieze. But for Bellows blackness must be contained, made secondary, to the point that it remain outside the very structure representing nationality. In rhetorically detaching the idea of slavery from this structure, Bellows must detach the emancipated as well. He concedes that the four statues do give the idea of emancipation an appropriately conspicuous place in the monument, but emphasizes that it is a lower place, representing emancipation as "a blessing, which being *deprivative*, leaves the Union itself without any mark of its late accursed presence." Hence the emancipation cycle, in this reading, shifts from a narrative of liberation and creation, social death and rebirth, to a mere sign of negation, a reminder of the *absence* of slavery from the newly unified nation.

We cannot know whether Bellows's letter represents Hosmer's intention. It does represent one way of rewriting her design without having to change the design itself, and she may well have approved of that rewriting. But Bellows's effort came to nothing. The Springfield association had already committed itself to a design competition, and although Hosmer's design was entered it was not even among the top vote-getters in the jury's balloting. The association ended up choosing a design by Larkin Mead which minimized the issue of emancipation much further than Bellows ever could with Hosmer's design. Mead returned to the formula of a standing Lincoln holding a scroll, on which was inscribed "Emancipation." This was the only reference to the subject. The subsidiary figures were not African Americans but white soldiers disposed in four combat groups; the sculpture turned the commemorative focus to the idea of warfare.

The Springfield competition is important to us because it was the only open competition for a monument to Lincoln held in the nineteenth century.[29] In fact the competition was held to publicize the project and legitimize it as a truly national undertaking. The dozens of entries received, mostly from sculptors and architects, represent in a fragmentary way the possibilities of the collective imagination; they show the range of

solutions that could be advanced even within the restrictive forum of a professional competition effectively open only to white artists who could command significant resources. What is interesting is that a substantial number of designs did propose to bring the African American body into representation, and—even more strikingly—the association looked seriously at them. Unfortunately, except for Hosmer's design and two others, the visual records of these entries have disappeared and we can imagine them only through written descriptions.[30]

Overall at least a quarter of the entries did include figures of freed men or women. The two designs submitted by sculptor Leonard Volk, for example, included statues of a freed slave and a Union soldier (presumably white) flanking the entrance to the tomb structure. One of the two designs incorporated a highly unusual allegory of emancipation: the figure of a slave woman holding a tablet bearing the Emancipation Proclamation. A few entries even tried to situate African American figures outside the conventional domains of allegory or documentary history. While Hosmer's model ostensibly recorded the past achievements of African Americans under Lincoln's administration, some designs actually took the emancipation theme out of the commemorative framework of "history" and situated it frankly in the contemporary context of debates over freedmen's rights. C. G. Volk's design included a group "representing the white and black boy building together, symbolizing the present position of the two races"; the board deciding the competition apparently discussed the design with the artist and left a note saying that it "considers past present and prospective of slavery."[31] However the design may have looked, it seemed to be a serious attempt at an interracial image, clearly departing from the commemorative norm. That it received any serious notice—and it did earn a few votes in the first balloting—indicates a surprising degree of openness to new racial representations never before seen in sculpture.

The most radical proposal came from Philadelphia sculptor A. E. Harnische; it deliberately set out to represent Lincoln's act of emancipation as "the introduction of a new era in [American] history."[32] In this multitiered assemblage of sculpture, with Lincoln holding the Emancipation Proclamation at the top, a cycle of conventional allegorical figures is coupled with a cycle of emancipation groups that address some of the central issues of Reconstruction. Next to last in the emancipation cycle is a figure of Power paired with a group representing education, in which male and female figures read a book; finally there is the figure of Justice to whom a freedman "with unshackled hands appeals for his rights as such." Here Harnische's design abandons the commemorative conceit entirely and becomes an open plea for the future. Lincoln's proclamation reads as the catalyst for a train of events whose final outcome is unresolved. This ap-

peal for education, power, and justice for the former slaves—none of which had yet been realized, despite Reconstruction—must have seemed too hot to handle, and the entry received no votes.[33]

With the Springfield group's eventual decision to avoid any representation of emancipated figures, whether secondary or not, the efforts on behalf of Hosmer's proposal came to an end. At this point the Western Sanitary Commission's campaign took one final surprising turn. Still lacking sufficient funds for what it considered to be a worthy monument, the commission decided to throw its money to yet another National Lincoln Monument Association and another design. This was the proposal, sponsored by leading Republicans in Congress and the administration, for an immense national monument to Lincoln and his era, to be erected on the Capitol grounds in Washington. Although it was to be funded by private donation, it was virtually an official project of the federal government, with the funds even managed by the U.S. treasurer.[34]

Of the two National Lincoln Monument Associations, this one was certainly the more logical home for the freedmen's fund. Unlike the Springfield monument, the Washington project was driven by the rhetoric of radical Reconstruction, with its platform of universal male suffrage and equal rights. Congress initiated the project in March 1867, shortly after it had passed the first Reconstruction Act, which required states in the South to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment (equal rights) and guarantee black male suffrage. The same coalition in Congress that passed this act also passed the bill sponsoring the national monument. The bill created "the Lincoln Monument Association, for the purpose of erecting a monument in the city of Washington, commemorative of the great charter of emancipation and universal liberty in America."[35] The dominant theme of the monument was thus fixed from the outset, and it looked forward more than backward. Note how the language slips from Lincoln to emancipation to universal liberty; by the end of this sequence the commemorative program encompasses the radical Republican agenda of racial equality under the law encoded in the term *universal* liberty. Under this formulation Lincoln himself is reconstructed, no longer simply the Civil War president but the founder of a new nation-state empowered to complete the "charter" he initiated with the Emancipation Proclamation. Ostensibly authorizing a monument to Lincoln, the bill really called for a monument to a newly emergent ideal of an interracial nationality.

The original fund-raising appeal of the association published in 1867 made that ideal explicit in the very first sentence, addressing "the loyal people of the United States of all classes, without distinction as to race or color."[36] This formulation is noticeably different from the fund-raising appeals of the Springfield association, which tended to treat African Americans as a separate constituency; here the emphasis is on one people,

united across divisions of class and race. Frederick Douglass had been appointed to the board of managers, and this first fund-raising appeal seems to bear his imprint.[37] At the end of his acrimonious exchange two years earlier with the "Colored People's Educational Monument Association," he had declared that he was never opposed to the idea of "mixing" white and black contributions to build a suitable monument to Lincoln, as long as the final result was not labeled a "colored" monument. In fact, for Douglass an all-black project was worthy if carried out honestly, but he preferred a mixed project, "a People's monument to Abraham Lincoln without distinction of color." He even suggested that the Colored People's Educational Monument Association turn over its money to a common fund for a people's monument because it "would be in harmony with our demands not for special privileges but for common rights and common equality before the law."[38]

It was perhaps in this spirit that the board of managers approached the Western Sanitary Commission in 1868 and began to negotiate for the freedmen's fund. By the end of the year the managers and the commission had worked out a deal, but the terms of the agreement betrayed the ideal that Douglass had promoted and the managers themselves had embraced in their first appeal for contributions. The commission agreed to transfer its $20,000 in funds to pay for the upper portion of the monument containing an effigy of Lincoln, that portion to be officially designated the freedmen's contribution.[39] The designation was obviously meant to preserve, at least in part, the integrity of the original freedmen's fund. But at the same time that designation dramatically altered the larger Reconstruction project: it created a monument within a monument, a color distinction built into the very fabric of the whole.

Moreover, the design that the Western Sanitary Commission bought its way into was problematic from the beginning. Chosen without competition in early 1868, the design by the sculptor Clark Mills made Hosmer's look simple and sparse by comparison [fig. 4.4]. A densely packed pyramid of sculpture, the model included over two dozen portrait statues of famous men in addition to a seated Lincoln on top, posed in the act of signing the proclamation and surrounded by allegories of justice, liberty, and time. In addition it included, on the next to lowest tier, an elaborate emancipation cycle, the only other besides Hosmer's that was approved and published in an adopted design. But Mills's cycle, though it was organized around the same basic idea of a progress from slavery to freedom, departed significantly from Hosmer's example. Here is the description taken from the stereo photograph distributed to subscribers:

> The first . . . presents the slave in his most abject state, as when brought to this country. Here we behold him nude, deprived of all which tends to elate the heart with any spirit of pride or independence.

4.4 Clark Mills, model for National Lincoln Monument, circa 1868, plaster (now lost).

> The second represents a less abject stage. He is here partly clad, more enlightened, and hence, realizing his bondage, startles with a love of Freedom.
>
> The third . . . is the ransomed slave, redeemed from bondage by the blood of Liberty, who, having struck off his shackles, holds them triumphantly aloft. The slave is pictured gratefully bowing at her feet.[40]

We do not know whether this description came from Mills or from the sponsors, but in either case it betrays an unshakable condescension toward the people it represents and supposedly commemorates. The African arrives abject, without self-pride or any notion of freedom or independence. These are acquired, paradoxically, by the enlightenment made possible under slavery (an assertion very close to the proslavery arguments made before the war); only then does the slave belatedly "realize his bondage" and feel "a love of Freedom." Of course, despite that newfound love, the slave cannot break his own shackles but must kneel to an allegorical Liberty, symbolic of the nation that paid his "ransom" in blood.

The groups as they appear in photographs of the model do represent a substantial departure from Hosmer's imagery. The two groups that frame the front side of the monument are not the first and last in the cycle but the first and second, so that the image of emancipation ends up on the very rear of the monument facing away from Lincoln. All three groups pair a standing figure with a sitting or kneeling figure, and all three, even the last, adopt the conventional slave postures of abasement or obeisance. In the second group, for example, where the slave "startles" to a love for freedom, the seated pose recalls the traditional emblem for suffering (as did Brown's slave figure for the Washington pediment) and the standing recalls Michelangelo's writhing slave figures, now in the Louvre. In the final group the manumission imagery reasserts itself, made ideal by the abstract agency of the allegorical figure. Yet the slave figure is even more obeisant than in the other designs we have seen, with his head still bowed and his hands reaching up to touch the proffered arm of his savior.

When the cycle is viewed within its sculptural context, the African American figures read even less as historical persons and more as signs of the nation's moral achievement. The cycle is sandwiched between two massive tiers of portrait statuary of great men, meant to represent the organizations and forces that "stood by" Lincoln and helped him triumph. Below the slaves are the great military heroes like Sherman and Grant striding forward on horseback; above are standing figures of representative cabinet officials, relief organizers, and ministers who helped advance the cause. In a monument that sought to materialize the history of an era in a vast array of heroic men, all represented standing or astride a horse, the black figures are conspicuous in their difference. In sculptural terms, they are shut out from the realist realm of the heroic likeness. It is not simply their anonymity, but their bodily self-absorption that is responsible. Bent over themselves or writhing to break free, their bodies have not yet attained the confident address to the world that would enable them to join the ranks of heroes and thereby enter the national chronicle of achievement. Their lack of historical identity and agency turns them into emblems rather than actors: their bodies define the moral cause for which the great white men on the monument struggled and fought.

It does seem peculiar that an association ostensibly dedicated to representing the new idea of universal liberty would choose such a paternalistic design, which despite the allegories of liberty and justice on top, reinscribed subservience in the black body and reaffirmed the black man's segregation from the civic realm of the hero. It is doubly peculiar when the personal history of the artist is considered. Mills was a slaveowner and used slave labor in his bronze foundry in Maryland until nearly the end of the Civil War; in one of the supreme ironies of Lincoln's era,

Mills's slaves help cast the collosal statue of Freedom which was installed atop the Capitol dome in December 1863 and immediately hailed as an augur of emancipation.[41] Mills had begun his career as a sculptor in South Carolina and retained strong ties with the region. In fact, in the spring of 1865, Mills was accused in the *New York Post* and the *Washington Star* of being a Confederate sympathizer (a charge that was actually corroborated by an informer), and at the same time he lost his studio inside the Capitol building.[42]

Moreover, Mills had acquired an infamous reputation in the art establishment as a philistine who won public commissions by pandering to popular taste. He was in almost every respect the opposite of Hosmer as an artist. Whereas she formally studied anatomy and carefully absorbed the classical canon in Italy, choosing to practice there amid the examples of antiquity, he was a self-taught artist who ignored the canon and never stepped foot in Europe. His great feat was to build his own bronze foundry and, without training or experience, cast the first equestrian statue in the United States—the Andrew Jackson Monument erected in Washington in 1853. Flouting classical models, Mills took the pose and gesture directly from a popular print and received enormous public acclaim simply because he managed to balance the horse on its hind legs. Both critics and admirers treated Mills's work as a litmus of the popular, and indeed of the American—insofar as these two notions were so often conflated. He was either an authentic exponent of American individualism and "natural" taste, as Stephen Douglas claimed in his oration at the Jackson Monument, or the embodiment of American arrogance and tastelessness.[43]

So why would an association of radical Republicans choose the design of a sculptor with so controversial a reputation, tainted by slavery and disloyalty? And why would the sponsors of the Freedmen's Memorial throw their chips in with a design and approach to design so different from Hosmer's? We cannot know for sure, since most of the relevant papers of both the association and the artist have been lost. But we may begin to find answers in an essay published in 1870 by Hosmer's supporter Henry Bellows, who turns out to be a link between the two projects. Bellows was chosen as one of the "representative men" included on Mills's pedestal, and he used his essay to promote the grand scheme. Although the design would have "a thousand defects of detail," he wrote, "we expect a result, grand and majestic, with something of the vastness and roughness of this stage of the popular taste, but at least an honest expression of American largeness of feeling and grandeur of purpose."[44] The terms of praise for Mills's design are entirely different from those he had applied to Hosmer's. Hosmer's was above all a work of art, to be compared with the great monuments of Europe. Art as understood in the

nineteenth century demanded formal unity, the subordination of details to the expression of a leading idea or ideas; as Bellows had put it in his Illinois letter, "the real test of the artist's genius" is not so much the choice of ideas but "the *management* of these ideas."[45] Hosmer had skillfully united the ideas of Union and emancipation in a harmonious whole. In defending the Mills design Bellows deliberately suspends his critical faculties. Mills's monument is not to be judged as a work of art but as an authentic expression of American character and sentiment. It is rough and defective in detail, but it is ambitious in its scope, accessible to popular taste, and honestly American.

Though both the designs by Hosmer and Mills are embedded in the mimetic tradition, centering on the imitation of the human figure, they nevertheless arrive at antithetical conceptions of the sculptural monument. For Hosmer mimesis is not an end in itself. Her model is really an allegorical monument, an exposition of ideas, with only one portrait effigy, that of the central hero. All her sculptural cycles—even the ostensibly "realistic" cycle of African Americans—are sign systems, meant to be read as the inscriptions are. They draw attention to their own act of historical interpretation, and in turn demand interpretation from the viewer. Mills is much more profoundly attached to realism. His design is above all an accumulation of effigies of great men, interspersed with some allegorical sculpture. Those effigies are not signs but likenesses, stand-ins for the real thing. They are not meant to interpret history but to duplicate it, to bring it back to life. Lincoln is not so much explained as he is surrounded by the men who helped him make history. The emancipation cycle appears anomalous amid these ranks of heroes above and below it. We can either see Mills's African American figures as "realistic," in which case they are pathetic historical specimens, or we can demote them to the secondary status of allegory. In Hosmer's design, by contrast, the emancipation cycle is central because it is vital to the monument's act of interpretation. For the critics, that self-conscious semiotic mediation was what made Hosmer an artist; Mills was "popular" or "natural" because he seemed to devalue that mediation.

If Mills's monument therefore did not conform to European models, that very disparity could be used to prove its authenticity. The association published a statement attributed to Lincoln's secretary of state, William Seward, who, having "seen the principal Monuments in Europe," asserted that "Europe could not have such a Monument for she has not such a history."[46] In this account Seward had been shown the design by Lincoln himself. According to the story Mills had actually conceived the monument while Lincoln was still alive (a claim that is indeed plausible) and had given a drawing of the design to Lincoln, who praised it but passed it on to Seward because he had traveled to Europe and was a